

# Dealing with Working-Mother Guilt

**W**ith all the expectations that society places on mothers, it's no wonder that we end up feeling somewhat guilty because we haven't quite measured up to that perfect maternal ideal. However, if you work outside the home, you probably feel more than just a twinge of guilt. Perhaps you've even come down with a full-blown case of working-mother guilt. But, is it justified? Probably not. Apparently working moms are not sacrificing quantity or quality in raising their children.

## We're Not That Different

Suzanne M. Bianchi, a well-known demographer and researcher has surveyed the current research literature. Her findings may help working mothers lessen some of that guilt. Bianchi points out:

- Despite the fact that more women are in the paid labor force than ever before, the time mothers spend with their children has changed very little over time.
- Although much effort has been devoted to searching for negative results from Mom working outside the home, there have been relatively few negative consequences for children.
- On the other hand, the lack of two parent-families does cause problems for children—both behaviorally and monetarily.
- Research by Cathleen Zick and Keith Bryant indicates that mothers today report spending as much time with their children as did mothers during the baby boom.
- Per family, Zick and Bryant estimate mothers in the 1920s spent the same time in child care activities as those in the 1970s.
- In the early twentieth century, mothers spent much of their time involved in unpaid family work and housework. In addition, larger families meant older children could mind younger children.
- Because families today are smaller, mothers actually spend more care time per child than mothers in previous generations.
- Although mothers who work outside the home do spend slightly less time with their children than nonworking mothers, the amount of time is not significant.
- Research suggests that working mothers protect time with their children by reallocating their priorities. They may do less housework or volunteer work and at the same time give up leisure time and sleep.
- Evidence suggests that mothers, on average, have not reduced their time with children, while fathers (at least married

fathers) have significantly increased the time they spend with their children.

## What's a Mom to Do?

Of course, working mothers realize the importance of finding companies that support families and give them the flexibility they desire to meet family needs. In addition, working women with children need to accept their choices and feel good about them. Studies show that if Mom is happy with her work situation, her family will be too.

Linda Ginac, a certified coach and career counselor, makes the following suggestions:

- Recognize that your life will be consumed with compromises and negotiations.** There will be days when work is the priority and other days when family will be the priority. This is okay.
- Modify your expectations.** Eliminate the phrases "should have" and "ought to" from your vocabulary. They only increase feelings of guilt. Making the cutest party invitations in the neighborhood is not really essential to your child's well being.
- Set rules.** Know what is important to you and set firm boundaries. Otherwise, your life may get out of control and you'll be even more overwhelmed.

## *If Mom is happy with her work situation, her family will be, too.*

•**Understand the need to be more flexible.** Without flexibility, you and your family will cease to grow.

•**Refrain from comparing your work/life relationship with others'.** Some people know how to paint a positive picture and communicate the ideals of their lifestyle while hiding all the negatives.

### **Some other advice?**

Take some cues from your working-dad husband. Carol Evans, CEO of Working Mother Media, says, "They are very proud of the time they spend with their children."

Do husbands feel working-father guilt? I don't think so. Can they let the housework go? I do think so. Can you pass some of the household duties on to them? Yes, if you'll let go of your control issues. Just ignore the crooked ponytails, and don't spazz if the whites and the darks get mixed together.

